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DEPARTMENT FOR DS/IP/RD/SCA, DS/DSS/ITA AND SCA/INS

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SUBJECT: EMBASSY COLOMBO EAC MEETING 08/27/2008 IN WAKE OF  
LTTE AIR TIGER ATTACK IN THE EAST

¶1. (SBU) Summary: AmEmbassy Colombo convened a meeting of the Emergency Action Committee (EAC) on August 27, 2008 to discuss post's security posture in light of an attack on a Sri Lanka naval base in Trincomalee, Sri Lanka. The attack occurred during the evening of August 26, 2008. GSL police and military sources informed the Embassy that the air wing, or "Air Tigers," of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) bombed the base at approximately 21:30 hr. local time. The EAC concurred that the actual threat did not, at this juncture, warrant revisions to post's security posture or the security advice to the general American community. End summary.

¶2. (SBU) On August 27, 2008, AmEmbassy Colombo convened an EAC meeting. Present for the meeting were the Ambassador, Acting Deputy Chief of Mission, Regional Security Officer, Political Officer, Economic Officer, Public Affairs Officer, Consular Officer, Management Officer, International Broadcasting Bureau Station Manager, USAID Acting Director, Officer in Charge of the Office of Defense Cooperation, Defense Attach Office's Operations Coordinator and the Marine Security Guard Detachment Commander. The agenda items for the meeting were:

-- The attack on the naval base in Trincomalee, which the GSL attributed to the LTTE Air Tigers

-- Post's security posture in light of the attack

-- Security posture for two groups of USG Amcit personnel who were in Trincomalee

-- Possible revisions to post's advice to the general American community

¶3. (SBU) According to GSL sources, the Sri Lanka Navy base in Trincomalee (approximately 200 miles northeast of Colombo, on the East coast) came under attack at around 21:30 hr. local time (12:00 EDT) on August 26. Sources stated that at least two light aircraft overflew the base and dropped two improvised explosive devices, one of which exploded. GSL interlocutors claimed that the aircraft belonged to the "Air Tigers," as both the LTTE and the GSL refer to the LTTE's air wing. These sources believed that the intended target was a troop transport and supply ship. According to Navy officials, anti-aircraft fire prevented the Air Tigers from reaching the troop ship. The planes vectored toward a barracks for enlisted personnel and dropped bombs on the barracks. One bomb exploded, while the other reportedly failed to detonate. Publicly, the GSL has stated that 10 or 11 people were injured. However, some AmEmbassy officers received reports that casualty figures were higher and that some seamen may have been killed.

¶4. (SBU) At the time of the attack, there were two separate groups of American citizen personnel in Trincomalee on official USG business. One group (five people from USAID's

Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance, or "OFDA") were lodged in a hotel located about five miles from the naval base, across Trincomalee Bay. The second group (two Raytheon radar technicians) was housed on the Navy base itself. The Embassy first learned of the attack when the OFDA officers contacted their AID control officer to report that a fire fight had erupted in Trincomalee. Although the OFDA personnel were not endangered by the attack, hotel staff chose to move them into another area of the facility. Although the Raytheon technicians were actually on the base, Embassy personnel learned that the technicians had not been too close to the attack site and were apparently in no danger, though they heard explosions. As of the morning of September 27, the Raytheon technicians had chosen to remain on base to complete their work. Meanwhile, the OFDA officers had departed Trincomalee, not in response to the attack, but rather to continue with their scheduled travel to other areas in the Eastern Province.

¶4. (SBU) The RSO commented that this incident fit the pattern of other LTTE attacks - the Air Tigers flew at night and were selective in their targeting. The targets were military ones, vice civilian, even though there are many potential civilian targets located in Trincomalee town and surrounding areas. The RSO further opined that it was reasonable to assume that as the noose tightens on the LTTE in the Northern Province (the Sri Lanka Army reports that it is within 12 kilometers of Kilinochchi, the LTTE's de facto capital), the terrorist organization would conduct reprisal attacks in other areas of Sri Lanka. Reprisal attacks and diversionary tactics are also standard operating procedures for the LTTE when it seeks to relieve pressure on the North. Therefore, this attack was another in a long series and did not indicate

a change in tactics or an increased threat to either the official or expatriate American communities.

¶5. (SBU) The EAC concurred that the true threat remains being in the wrong place at the wrong time - i.e. in proximity to an LTTE attack on a GSL military, political, economic or law enforcement target, and thus becoming an unintended victim of the attack. The EAC agreed that this attack did not represent a change in LTTE tactics. Therefore, there was nothing new to report to either the official or expatriate American communities. Accordingly, the EAC decided that it was not necessary, at this time, to either revise post's security posture or amend the security advice that post provides to the general American community. The EAC further decided that official Americans may continue travel to Trincomalee for business purposes without waiting for approval from the RSO and DCM. The restricted travel policy will continue to proscribe personal travel to Trincomalee for the official American community for the foreseeable future. The Ambassador agreed with the EAC's recommendations.

¶6. (U) Post will continue to monitor the security environment and will report further developments, if any, septel. POC for this message is RSO Michael V. Perkins, who may be contacted at 94.11.249.8885, 94.11.249.8888 (MSG Post 1 after regular business hours), perkinsmv@state.gov (unclassified email), or perkinsmv@state.sgov.gov (classified email).  
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